DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 819 CG 023 188

AUTHOR Avedon, Lisa
TITLE Issues in Counselling Stable Workers Forced To Make Job Changes.
PUB DATE Jan 91
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Consultation on Vocational Counselling (17th, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, January 22-24, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Counseling; *Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Client Relationship; *Dislocated Workers; *Employment Counselors; Foreign Countries; Job Search Methods; Models
IDENTIFIERS Canada

ABSTRACT

Counselors whose clients are workers displaced in plant closures and downsizings face a number of unique issues because they do not have a conceptual model on which to base their interventions. The types of work force attachment individuals have affects the issues with which they are coping. Four different kinds of work force attachments are delineated in this paper. They pertain to the following worker types: (1) career building, which includes those who are upwardly mobile and have long-term goals; (2) stable, those who establish themselves in jobs with the intention of remaining until they retire because they dislike change; (3) mobile, those who seek change in their work lives and who have skills which allow them to change jobs with little difficulty; and (4) erratic, those who have difficulty obtaining and retaining jobs because of personal problems. Since the majority of displaced workers can be found in the stable category, this paper focuses mainly on them. In establishing a relationship with the displaced worker as client a number of issues must be considered. First, it is important to understand at what stage in the coping process the clients have arrived. In addition, assessment procedures are likely to be impacted by the oral culture of the displaced workers, few of whom have ever been asked to reflect on or interpret their job skills, especially in writing. Informal procedures tend to be more useful than formal ones; stable workers seem to learn best by doing, and therefore coaching and practice are the preferred learning methods in developing job search skills and in preparing for skill certification tests. How much help is needed during the implementation phase depends on the complexity of the action steps, the resources readily available to the clients, and the probability of achieving their goals. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ISSUES IN COUNSELLING STABLE WORKERS FORCED TO MAKE JOB CHANGES

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Lisa Avedon
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Lisa Avedon, Ontario Ministry of Labour

ED329819

Introduction and background

Counsellors whose clients are workers displaced in plant closures and downsizings face a number of unique issues because they do not have a conceptual model on which to base their interventions. The reason for this is that while plant closures and downsizings have been a fact of life since the industrial revolution, workers usually were able to cope effectively with them, and only those who were forced to make changes for reasons of health or sought changes voluntarily became counselling clients. Today, however, the combination of technological and economic changes have created such uncertainty that the majority of the workers who are displaced are likely to need some help.

Unfortunately, because of the paucity of research and evaluation, counsellors have few opportunities to learn how they can increase their effectiveness, so they do the best they can, using familiar models on a trial and error basis which, if they seem to work, become their standards.

CG023188

Vocational counselling has traditionally been based on two approaches which I find have limited applicability for displaced workers because of the assumptions which are inherent in them.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In the vocational development approach, counsellors help clients identify the choices they make and the tasks they have during the life span. In adulthood, those involve establishing and maintaining oneself in a line of work or career. This approach assumes that one's line of work or career will continue without disruption.

The individual difference approach identifies traits such as skills, interests, and values and matches them with those of specific occupations. It assumes the availability of a range of job possibilities and access to them.

Neither of these approaches provide structures which counsellors can use to judge the appropriateness of the kinds or the timing of interventions when they are counselling displaced workers.

A new paradigm

Over the years, in my experiences with several hundred plant closures and downsizings, I found that the types of work force attachment individuals have affect the issues with which they are coping; therefore, I propose that examining these issues in relation to the counselling process can provide information helpful to developing a useful conceptual model.

First we need to have a common understanding of the different kinds of work force attachment, which I have delineated into four types:

1. career building includes those who are upwardly mobile and have long-term visions or goals they wish to achieve. They can be divided into two sub-types:

   a. competency depth - those who want to increase their competency so that they can excel in a specific field. The professions and the arts are examples.

   b. competency breadth - those who want to develop a broad range of competencies, such as would be required in entrepreneurial efforts or leadership positions in management.

2. stable are those who establish themselves in jobs or lines of work with the intention of remaining in them until they retire because they dislike change.

3. mobile are those who seek change in their work lives and have skills which allow them to move in and out of jobs or lines of work with little difficulty.

4. erratic are those who have difficulty obtaining and retaining jobs because of personal problems. They are often long-term

clients of employment centres and social service agencies.

The majority of workers displaced because of plant closings and downsizings can be found in the **stable** category, some in the **mobile** category, and a small percentage who are **career oriented.** I have never found displaced workers who fit into the **erratic** category, I suppose because they would have been fired before the adjustment process began.

Now, let us look at how this representation relates to the steps in the counselling process and what general questions may be helpful in determining the category a client is in.

	TYPE OF WORKFORCE ATTACHMENT career stable mobile erratic building
COUNSELLING PROCESS	
1. establishing relationship with client	Is the client seeking a change? What has been the client's past experience with counselling? How willing is client to share feelings? How easily can problems be identified?

	What are the client's coping strategies? His/her emotional state?
	Are there sensitive issues such as culture, language, literacy which must be considered?
2. assessment	
- informal	Does the client have a good understanding of his/her skills?
- formal	What assessment instruments could provide helpful information?
3. providing information	What form should it take?
	Can the client be referred or must resources be brought to the client?
	What are the client's priorities?
4. decision making	What is the client's style?
	What are the best ways of helping establish and decide the hierarchy of alternatives and possibility of achievement?

5. implementation	What kinds of support systems does the client have and need?
6. follow-up	What short-term and long-term services are required?

Counselling the stable client

Since my purpose is to focus on stable workers, let us now examine the problems specific to them and how they impact on the counselling process.

In establishing a relationship with the displaced worker as client, there are a number of issues. First, it is important to understand at what stage in the coping process clients are. Often they have not had the opportunity to have their feelings legitimized. If they are in a state of **disorientation**, their emotions may get in the way of their ability to begin working on those tasks which are necessary if they are to benefit from the process.(1)

Since stable clients do not desire change, and in the case of displaced workers resist change, it may be difficult to get them to focus on the future, or if they do, to develop the kinds of problem focused coping strategies which enable them to take appropriate steps.(2)

Few stable workers have had contact with the helping professions and may be wary or confused by the interaction with a counsellor. The culture in manufacturing plants, particularly unionized ones is an oral one, so they may not respond well to a great deal of written material, either writing it or reading it.

Assessment procedures are impacted by the oral culture as well. It is likely that the clients have never been asked to think about, reflect on or interpret their job skills, especially in writing. Informal procedures tend to be more useful than formal ones because it is easier to get them to talk about what they can and like to do than to get that information on paper.

Providing information can be as problematic as is establishing a relationship with displaced workers. The form, timing, and order in which information is provided are very important in relation to their coping strategies. Counsellors tend to provide too much information too quickly for the clients to absorb all of it because of the emotional issues involved. Often clients blame themselves for not being able to deal with what they are being told, and so do not give honest feedback to counsellors because they are fearful of appearing to be stupid. At the same time, displaced workers may have a great sense of urgency in obtaining the information they need to get on with their lives.

Those who have been long-term employees need both information on and opportunities to develop skills in job search. Resumes, job interviews and complex job application forms are unknown to those who were hired in an era when you spoke to the foreman one day and were tried out on the job the next.

Stable workers are seldom aware of how they make decisions about jobs or of their decision making styles, and may need help in understanding the relevance of detailing the process. However, my experience has been that once they understand the process, they begin to appreciate the fact that it can be helpful in coping with the dramatic changes they may have to make. I would assume that when they get to this stage, they have resolved or are in the process of resolving problems that blocked them initially.

Implementation requires step-by-step learning for which an end can be seen. Unlike the career builders who tend to on-going exploration, stable workers want to be able to see an end to the process or they give up trying. We have seen that happen when they are unemployed or forced to take temporary, and/or part-time work for a long period of time, eventually "settling for" a diminished economic status. Stable workers seem to learn best by doing; therefore, coaching and practice are the preferred learning methods in developing job search skills and in preparing for skill certification tests.

How much help is needed during the implementation phase depends on the complexity of the action steps, on the resources readily available to them, and the probability of achieving their goal.

The follow-up measures that are necessary depend, of course, on what happens in the implementation stage.

Conclusion

The paradigm I am proposing lends itself to critical examination at each step of the vocational counselling process. As I stated in the beginning, we badly need research which examines the issues counsellors face as they attempt to help displaced workers, especially those who have stable attachments to the work force and are being forced to make changes for which they are unprepared in terms of their emotional or skills constructs.(3)

Footnotes

(1) I have discussed these in previous NATCON proceedings. They can be found in NATCON 9 (1985), **Counselling victims of job loss**, and in NATCON 12 (1987), **Coping strategies of the involuntarily unemployed.**

(2) see in this issue, M.J. Lerner, **What do displaced workers need from counsellors: Unrealistic optimism or harsh realities?** and M.J. Lerner and D.G. Somers, **Employees' reactions to an anticipated plant closure: the influence of positive illusions.** In L. Montada, S. Filip, and M.J. Lerner (Eds.) (in press) **LIFE CRISES AND EXPERIENCES OF LOSS IN ADULTHOOD,** Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Assoc.

(3) the author would appreciate readers' comments, criticisms, suggestions on the efficacy of this approach.

Please write: Lisa Avedon
Office of Labour Adjustment
Ontario Ministry of Labour
400 University Ave., 15th floor,
Toronto, Ontario
Canada
M7A 1T7

to be published in the proceedings of the National Consultation on Vocational Counselling, Ottawa, 1991.